DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 261 562 HE 017 988

AUTHOR Young, Mark A.
TITLE Institutional Planning for Non-Traditional Students at a Rural State College.
PUB DATE Oct 84
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Northern Rocky Mountain Educational Research Association (2nd, Jackson Hole, WY, October 4-6, 1984).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Learning; *Adult Students; Ancillary School Services; *Change Strategies; *College Planning; Curriculum Development; Higher Education; Institutional Advancement; Long Range Planning; *Nontraditional Students; Public Relations; Rural Schools; State Colleges; Student Characteristics; Student College Relationship; *Student Needs; *Student Recruitment; Workshops

ABSTRACT

A workshop was used as a long-term planning method by a small, rural state college in Montana to promote recruitment and service to nontraditional students (adults 25 years old or older). The first step was the review of national trends and conditions within the state and college by a committee composed of administrators, faculty, and nontraditional students. The workshop provided recommendations to improve recruitment of this population, as well as student services and the curriculum. Information was provided on key differences between traditional and nontraditional students, as well as conditions within the college that affect older students (i.e., study areas, office hours, computer orientation). In addition to considering academic preferences of nontraditional students, workshop participants discussed instructional alterations that would benefit adult learning. The findings of two studies were presented: a survey on nontraditional students, and a survey of faculty members' views of the needs of nontraditional students. Included in this workshop report are a summary and analysis of the survey findings, short-term recommendations for public relations and institutional progress, and long-term recommendations for acquisition/renovation, and curriculum development. (SW)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED261562

INSTITUTIONAL PLANNING FOR NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS AT A RURAL STATE COLLEGE

Professional Paper
presented to the
NORTHERN ROCKY MOUNTAIN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION
October, 1984 -- Jackson, Wyoming

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Mark A. Young

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

MARK A. YOUNG
Doctoral Student, Montana State University
Bozeman, Montana

HE 017 938

(4.1)

ABSTRACT

"Institutional Planning for Non-Traditional Students
at a Rural State College"

Mark A. Young

As college and university traditional student markets decrease in size due to population shifts, birth rates, and economic conditions, new markets are sought to maintain stable enrollments. For a rural college (enrollment 1,000) with a traditional teacher education role in an agricultural-based town (population 5,000) within the sparsely populated state of Montana (population 800,000), the challenges for the administrative and academic sectors are immense. This paper is resultant of a doctoral internship conducted as a part of a small state college's institutional planning for the next decade. The study sought faculty assessments of non-traditional students perceived needs and a survey of current non-traditional students to ascertain their viewpoint and concerns. For the purpose of this study, a non-traditional student was considered to be anyone 25 years of age or older.

An institutional workshop was conducted to mull nation, state, and college projections while suggesting recommendations to enhance student services, curriculum development, and recruitment of non-traditional students. The workshop sought to identify key differences between traditional and non-traditional students and further indicate areas within the institution that impact older students (i.e. study areas, office hours, computer orientation). After recognizing academic preferences of non-traditional students, workshop participants discussed instructional alterations that would benefit learning by adult students. By sensitizing campus personnel toward older students, the recruitment and retention of these students is influenced and institutional barriers are minimized.

This paper's focus is on designing, planning, and implementing a faculty workshop to address the issue of increasing adult student enrollment. In a state with an enrollment-driven funding mechanism, it behooves college officials to encourage credit courses while making them available and meaningful to non-traditional students. This study is how one small college addressed the learning and non-learning needs of older students in its institutional planning process.

HE 017 988

One reality adult educators must presently face is increasing demand by non-traditional students on higher education's academic and student service structures. With population shifts, secondary schools continue to deliver fewer college and university students (National Center for Education Statistics, 1982). Hence, it behooves institutions and systems of higher education to develop "institutional philosophies" towards recruiting, instructing, and servicing the burgeoning numbers of non-traditional students seeking learning opportunities (Cross, 1981; Cross & McCartan, 1984).

Using some elements of the corporate world's strategic planning methodology (Hampton, Summer, & Webber, 1973), appropriately modified to meld with higher education, administrative directives need concentrate on non-traditional learners and developing long and short range institutional planning. Generally speaking, the literature (Leckie, 1978; Weathersby & Torule, 1980) uses the single variable of chronological age commencing between ages 22 and 30 to identify the non-traditional student. Other critical variables such as marital and employment status or residence and annual income have been used to differentiate the non-traditional learner (Ward & Korz, 1969; Jurand-Salter, 1980).

IDENTIFY THE LEARNER

While each institution must assume responsibility for identifying its own, or its prospective, non-traditional students, some common identifiers have been substantiated through studies (Pratt, 1984; Holtzclaw, 1980; & Hughes, 1983). The three differences between traditional and non-traditional students provide a useful foundation for greater understanding of the adult student.

MULTIPLE COMMITMENTS

White (1981) joins other authors in noting that non-traditional students have a multitude of commitments beyond the classroom and consequently value their educational experiences more highly than traditional students (Firenze, 1984).

--Older students are responsible for themselves, and frequently are directly responsible for the well-being of others

--They usually are fulfilling several roles typical of mature adults in our society (e.g. worker, taxpayer, voter, concerned community citizen, spouse, parent)

--Often, they see formal educational activity as one of several competing or conflicting priorities, and often as incidential activity, though one of increasing importance

NOT CAMPUS FOCUSED

Another characteristic views the non-traditional student as usually currently employed or has been employed, married, has a family, and is a tax paying citizen (Ballie, 1976). The family and/or work environment take precedence over the educational setting (Scanlan & Darkenwald, 1984). These work and home commitments act as barriers preventing older students from centering their attention to on-campus activities.

INFORMAL LEARNING

Non-traditional students, particularly those without any prior post-secondary education, are influenced by informal education such as work and life experiences and often shy away from formal academic structures that imply the exigency for study and communication skills as well as library, computer and research skills (Hentges, 1983). Hameister and Hickey (1977) imply this contrast as does White (1981) when speaking of the older students wanting educational experiences to aid them in every-day living and being more problem-solving centered and less oriented to subject-matter.

INSTITUTIONAL PLANNING

Planning to assimilate older students into traditional student bodies needs to be accomplished with forethought and input from several constituencies (Cross & McCartan, 1984). A general purpose statement should be drawn up and agreed upon by all interested parties (faculty, students, administration) before proceeding. Once consensus is attained on a purpose statement, a working plan should be developed to implement the stated goals.

Similarly, objectives need be drawn up that center on specific learning and non-learning needs of the non-traditional students. Administrative and academic structures should be reviewed with the older student in mind. Likewise, student and auxiliary services should take into consideration expressed preferences by adult students.

The purpose of this paper is to exhibit how one small rural state college addressed its institutional concerns for non-traditional students.

A committee composed of administrators, faculty, and non-traditional students planned the workshop moving from national trends, to statewide conditions, to our particular institution. The workshop goal sought to assist participants gain better understanding of non-traditional students while suggesting different methods and techniques and offering institutional recommendations that might benefit the adult learner. The workshop was designed with four objectives as follows:

1. identify the key differences between traditional and non-traditional students
2. indicate at least three areas within the institution that impact non-traditional students
3. select two actions one might take in his/her own role in the institution reflecting individual concern for non-traditional students
4. suggest three actions that could be implemented on an institutional level to accommodate non-traditional students

Workshop participation was encouraged on all levels -- faculty, support and auxiliary staff, administration, and students. It was believed a good mix would heighten awareness and facilitate thinking. Using andragogical teaching techniques, the first session was led by a published author on the subject "Turning Our Attention to Non-traditional Students". His presentation targeted the decline in traditionally-aged student pool, increase in number of adult students, primary focus of older students, and preferences stated by surveyed students at his institution. In addition, he characterized the academic life and utilization of campus services of older students. This set the tone for identification of the key differences (multiple commitments, not campus focused, informal learning preference) between traditional and non-traditional students.

Following the session, this doctoral student reported on his findings from an earlier faculty assessment on perceived needs and a non-traditional student survey, as well as, providing a graphic explanation of the institution's make-up of non-traditional students since 1979 and projection for student composition percentage in 1993. A summary of the faculty assessment concluded most...

> ...respondents (64%) estimate 5-10% of their class population are non-traditional students, although 28% estimate adult students exceed 20%. About half (44%) noticed an increase in this student population during the last five years. Faculty ranked study habits, baby-sitting/day care, grades, and tests as perceived

concerns non-traditional students may experience. Of least concern fell academic advisement, course requirements, and keeping up with younger students. Generally speaking, faculty saw needs of most adult students as learning needs (63%). All faculty (100%) were sympathetic to students' needs while most (92%/88%) believed these needs affected students' participation and course receptivity and that meeting of outside course requirements (writing papers, library research, projects, etc.) were affected by those same needs. Most faculty (79%) stated they had not altered their course content and/or instructional methods in recent years to meet the needs of adult students. While some (21%) had made adjustments of some kind. Nearly one-half (48%) anticipate the numbers of non-traditional students in their disciplines to increase over the next five years.

An analysis of the assessment followed stating...

...faculty respondents recognize significantly fewer adul students in their classes than actually exist (34%). This may be accountable to the fact that the faculty ranks are supplemented with auxiliary faculty who instruct a major share of workshop, weekend, off-campus, and night courses which have heavy concentrations of adult students. This may also be the answer why one-half (51%) of the faculty have not noticed an increase of adult students in their classes and do not anticipate increased numbers in their disciplines in the next five years.

While most faculty see needs of adult students as being learning needs, respondents identified the non-learning needs of baby-sitting/day care and financial assistance as concerns expressed by non-traditional students. This dichotomy may result in faculty feeling they have little control over non-learning needs and subsequently feel they cannot adequately affect learning needs either.

Whatever needs are identifiable have been basically unserved by the alteration of course content and/or adjustments in instructional methods by most faculty. The literature focuses on specific preferences expressed by adult students. Perhaps some attention, individually and collectively, should be given to the academic and instructional preferences of non-traditional students.

A review of the student survey unveiled that...

...most students (76%) feel faculty are aware of non-traditional students learning/non-learning needs, and they (75%) have recognized an increase in the adult student population in their classes. Of most concern to these students (in rank order) are course requirements, grades, tests, study habits, and academic advisement, while of least concern are baby-sitting/day care, hesitancy to ask questions, and keeping up with younger students. More than one-half (60%) of the respondents believe these concerns affect their participation and receptivity in

the classroom. Nearly two-thirds (61%) considered most of their needs being learning (study skills, tests, etc.) needs. Respondents generally felt (68%) that meeting of course requirements outside of the classroom (i.e. writing papers, library research, projects) were affected by their learning/non-learning needs.

Students overwhelmingly (84%) believe that professors are sympathetic with adult students' learning and non-learning needs but perceive that few professors have altered their course content and/or instructional methods to meet these needs (58%).

The five changes (in rank order) they wished most to see included more 1, 2, and 3 day workshops, more weekend classes, more evening classes, more time available with individual professors, and less emphasis on grades.

Most respondents (78%) were employed 20 hours per week or more, while over 61% stated they worked full-time (40 hrs/week). When asked what primary category they would place themselves in, they responded with teacher (31%), homemaker (20%), student (16%), retired (3%), unemployed (3%). Respondents ranked the following things they liked best about the institution: small class size, small student body size, geographic setting, teacher availability, classroom setting, and academic offerings.

The analysis asserted...

...some perceived needs such as baby-sitting/day care, afraid to ask questions, and keeping up with younger students were marked of low concern by the respondents. Of course, it may be that students enrolled have already made suitable baby-sitting/day care arrangements, therefore it is not a concern any longer or that baby-sitting/day care arrangements are simply a spousal concern.

A misconception sometimes held that non-learning needs such as finances, day care, housing, etc. affect the adult student's ability to meet class requirements beyond classroom walls would be validated by this survey. Apparently, while these needs are of concern to adult students, they state that needs do not interfere with satisfying course requirements. Perhaps, the older students rise above these non-learning needs to satisfy teacher expectations.

While non-traditional students generally feel faculty are understanding of their needs, few students have recognized any significant alteration of course content or adjustment in instructional methods by faculty. The literature on older students espouses certain academic and instructional preferences. Being aware of the numbers of adult students, perhaps the adult learning preferences expressed by older students should be addressed.

Recognizing the nature of today's adult learner, the overwhelming request for more workshops, weekend courses, and

evening classes should come as no surprise. The fact that most older students are employed at least half-time (20 hrs/wk) and that less than a fifth of respondents consider their primary roles as a student lends evidence to this request.

No surprise to most people at the institution is that the "smallness" is an advantage. Students like small classes, small student body, and the small town. The question would arise if this "small" image is used to a recruiting advantage to attract older students.

Next, four non-traditional students, representing a cross-section of older students, served on a panel responding individually to several prepared questions and then answering questions from the workshop participants. This session served to reinforce the two earlier discussions on the characteristics and preferences of non-traditional students and encouraged participants to begin thinking of meaningful ways to make necessary personal and institutional changes.

Following the panel, break out groups were formed with a facilitator and scribe for each unit. They were asked to use consensus techniques to suggest two short-term and two long-term recommendations that could be implemented to benefit adult students. After individual group reports, a process of consolidation was administered by this author. Generally speaking, the recommendations fell into four categories: public relations and institutional development in the short-term area and acquisition/renovation and curriculum development in the long-term area. The recommendations were categorized as follows:

Short-term Recommendations

A. Public Relations

1. Cultivate employer contacts
2. Survey community
3. Reduce cost for first credit
4. Establish reciprocity with neighboring states
5. Ads in area newspapers
6. Promote mini-courses

B. Institutional Progress

1. Financial aid "seed money"
2. Part-time employment listing
3. Advisory board with clout
4. Importance of first contact
5. Tap graduate student market
6. More information on facilities orientation
7. Seminar for study skills
8. Contacts with prospective employers

Long-term Recommendations

A. Acquisition/Renovation

1. Update instructional equipment
2. Dorm rooms available by the night
3. Evening/lunch office hours for library, etc.
4. Separate study area in Student Union Building

B. Curriculum Development

1. Expand off-campus courses
2. "Rotation" of required courses
3. Faculty need to be current in major field
4. Simplify registration process
5. Offer mail-in registration
6. Promote unique programs
7. More relevant courses, e.g., free seminars

In concluding the workshop, participants were asked to evaluate the process and content. Summarily, participants were pleased with the heighten awareness, felt the objectives had been met, and hoped the workshop's momentum would be reflected in institutional change.

As a result of this aforementioned institutional planning process, a carefully planned systematic approach has begun to integrate the non-traditional student into every aspect of the campus. Adult students will be welcomed, served, and appreciated at this institution.

POST SCRIPT

At the current time, a Non-Traditional Student Committee has been formed to formulate specific recommendations to campus committees and interested groups.

REFERENCES

Baillie, O. (1976). "The non-traditional student needs assessment project: Counseling assistance for older students". Unpublished document. University of Massachusetts.

Cross, K.P. (1981). Adults as Learners. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 76-78.

Cross, K.P. & McCartan, A.M. (1984). "Adult Learning: State Policies and Institutional Practices". ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Research Reports, 1.

Firenze, L.J. (1984). "Educational objectives of traditional vs. non-traditional alumni at one institution". Lifelong Learning: An Omnibus of Practice and Research, 5, 13-14.

Hameister, D.R. & Hickey, T. (1977). "Traditional and adult students: A dichotomy". Lifelong Learning: The Adult Years, 1, 6.

Hampton, D.R., Summer, C.A. & Webber, R.A. (1973). Organizational Behavior and the Practice of Management. Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Company, 434.

Hentges, K. (1983). "The holistic life cycle curriculum in adult education: A proposal". Lifelong Learning: An Omnibus of Practice and Research, 2, 16-17.

Holtzclaw, L.R. (1980). "Learning problems of adults in higher education". North Central Association Quarterly, 54, 355-364.

Hughes, R. (1983). "The non-traditional student in higher education: A synthesis of the literature". National Association of Student Personnel Administrators Journal, 3, 51-64.

Jurand-Salter, L. (1980). "Re-entering academe: The older student on campus". Teaching Learning Issues, 46, 14.

Leckie, S. (1978). "The new student on campus". Educational Horizons, 56, 196-199.

National Center for Education Statistics. (1982, June 23). "Trends in Higher Education". The Chronicle of Higher Education, 10.

Pratt, D.D. (1984). "Teaching adults: A conceptual framework for first session". Lifelong Learning: An Omnibus of Practice and Research, 6, 7-9.

Scanlan, C.S. & Darkenwald, G.G. (1984). "Identifying deterrents to participation in continuing education". Adult Education Quarterly, 3, 155-166.

Ward, R.F. & Korz, T.E. (1969). "The commuting student: A study of facilities at Wayne State University". Detroit: Michigan State University.

Weathersby, R.P. & Tarule, J.M. (1980). Adult Development: Implications for Higher Education. Washington: American Association of Higher Education.

White, R.K. (1981). "Working with the adult student". Paper presented at National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, New York.